DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 175 218 EC 120 218

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TITLE The Identification of Youngsters Who Are Chronically Disruptive.
INSTITUTION Iowa State Dept. of Public Instruction, Des Moines. Div. of Special Education.
PUB DATE [Apr 79]
NOTE 16p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Problems; *Definitions; Educational Diagnosis; *Identification; State Standards; *Student Characteristics
IDENTIFIERS *Chronically Disruptive; Iowa

ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the identification of chronically disruptive students in Iowa. The first section details the sociological and educational characteristics of chronically disruptive students. Such students are said to be rebellious, to defy behavioral standards, and to fare poorly in academics. A second section addresses differential diagnosis of chronically disruptive from emotionally disturbed students. The Iowa definition and identification procedures are discussed, including such topics as exclusion and separation and the use of behavioral data (objective observational data, checklist data, and anecdotal school records). Harmful effects of suspension are described, and the need for appropriate educational intervention stressed. (CL)

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5130-D8899-4/79

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THE IDENTIFICATION OF YOUNGSTERS WHO ARE CHRONICALLY DISRUPTIVE

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Introduction

Educational programming for that handicapped population referred to in our state as "Chronically Disruptive" is a relatively recent concept. This particular classification of handicapped pupils did not appear until 1974 when the 65th General Assembly of the Iowa Legislature included this population of youngsters in our Special Education legislation. Chronically disruptive is a term unique to Iowa but is similar to such terminology as seriously socially maladjusted used in other states. While there were few programs of this type in 1974, we are seeing an increase of both number of youngsters identified as chronically disruptive as well as an increase in educational programs serving this population.

Although this paper will center around the issue of identification, several facets of this process will be discussed. The first portion will deal with the characteristics, both sociologically and educationally, of chronically disruptive pupils. Closely aligned with this discussion is an attempt to clarify those issues involved with differentially diagnosing this population from that population of handicapped youngsters referred to in Iowa as emotionally disabled.

This paper will also address both the theoretical and practical issues surrounding the identification process itself. And, the final portion of this paper will deal with the educational concerns regarding the provision of an appropriate special education program for chronically disruptive youngsters.

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Characteristics

As stated above, the term "chronically disruptive" is, to our best knowledge, a special education term unique to Iowa. This does not imply that our state is the only one which provides programs for these youngsters. Skinner (1975) states that these youngsters may be referred to in other states as alienated youth, youth in transition, political youth, delinquents, children of the street, problem pupils, socially maladjusted, to name a few.

Who are these youngsters? What are they like? Our description will begin with an overview of this population in both sociological and educational terms. I chose to do this because of the intertwining nature of these variables in dealing with such youngsters.

Morse (1958) describes these youth as "semi-socialized children." He goes on to describe such sociological characteristics as: 1) a strong personal defense against accepting the broader values of society, and 2) a youngster's engagement in a civil war with the culture at large and a skirmish conflict with his own feelings. Morse expands the second sociological characteristic by saying, "Significant battles are conducted against the cultural agents. Police are not protectors but 'cops' out to get you; teachers are not helpers but 'drill sergeants' ordering the educational draft. They represent the enemy." (p. 572)

Chronically disruptive youngsters are frequently characterized by their tendency to grossly defy what most of us consider to be the broad cultural mores governing behavior in our society. Although this defiance may be an accepted behavior in an immediate peer group, it tends to create problems for parents, teachers, principals, law enforcement agencies and others of us who are charged with the responsibility of teaching those values our society expects from its young people. As Telford and Sawrey (1967) state, "Their accepted code of conduct involves truancy, fighting, and defiance of constituted

authority. They are handicapped by having learned a provincial pattern of social values, by their conformity to a code that differs from that of the general population." (p. 400)

Morse (1977) points out that many of these youngsters may be described as having serious defects in socialization. He states:

> These are the value-deficient (as contrasted with the value different children) who are growing up without acquiring an age appropriate concern for others. This pattern is probably the most rapidly growing group; we also see an increasing number of girls who evidence this dilemma. As the primary socialization factors in society have become less effective, there are more and more desperate children with no trust and no caring, who live on their impulses. (p. 567)

As noted by Kirk (1972), "delinquent" is also a term often used to describe this population. One should keep in mind, however, that delinquency is a legal term which is placed on these youngsters only after their behavior has led to arrest and court action; a sequence of events commonly observed with this population. Programs for chronically disruptive youngsters may be dealing with legally adjudicated youth as well as with youngsters who may never have been adjudicated. We will discuss this in more detail in a later part of this paper. In reference to the school and its relationship to the legally adjudicated youngster, Gagne (1977) states, "According to present trends, one youngster in nine will find himself in court before age 18 (Bronfenbrenner, 1974); thus, schools should be prepared to deal with problems of delinquents." (p. 13)

In addition to the behavior patterns described above, chronically disruptive youngsters often lag behind their peers in academic performance. In a special report prepared for Congress by the Departments of Justice and Health, Education, and Welfare (1977), academic deficiencies were found to be extensive among institutionalized juvenile delinquent populations in Connecticut and Virginia. Of the 129 juveniles tested in the two states, 99, or 77%, were found to have primary or secondary learning problems. Results such as this

indicate our need to address both the behavioral and academic needs of this population of handicapped pupils.

In summary, we are dealing with a handicapped population with specific behavioral and academic characteristics. Such pupils are rebellious in our schools and grossly defy what are considered to be our school behavioral "standards." A lack of academic achievement, which appears to be the result of such unacceptable behavior over an extended period of time, is also often seen in this population of handicapped pupils.

Differentiation of Chronically Disruptive from Emotionally Disabled

One of the most difficult tasks facing us is to differentiate the population known as "chronically disruptive" from that handicapped population referred to as "emotionally disabled." Before doing this I would like to address the question, "Why is it important to differentiate between these two populations?" The two major reasons I see for differentiating these populations are: 1) the unique educational applications associated with each of these populations and 2) the effects each group may have on the other.

There are specific intervention management and educational strategies particular to chronically disruptive youngsters which, although similar, do not necessarily apply to the emotionally disabled. Such is the reasoning which led to a decision, historically, to separate institutions dealing with delinquents from those institutions dealing with mentally ill youngsters. These unique strategies may include: 1) the particular structure of the educational program and the reflection of such a structure through the individual goals of each youngster's program, 2) the type of intervention chosen in times of behavioral crisis, 3) the use of mental health professionals in program support, 4) the use of juvenile agencies in support of the program, 5) the consequences applied for misbehavior, 6) the exit criteria of reintegration,

and 7) the role of the peers in the overall program. Each of these areas may vary according to whether one is programming for chronically disruptive or emotionally disabled pupils. Differential diagnosis and educational programming is important.

Another variable we must keep in mind as educators, is the interaction of emotionally disabled and chronically disruptive pupils. A chronically disruptive youngster who is outwardly aggressive, hostile and defiant may have a negative effect on the emotionally disabled pupil. Likewise the severely emotionally disabled, highly anxious, internally disoriented, youngster may have less than a positive effect on the chronically disruptive youngster. The teachers of these groups may have the difficulties of their job multiplied by having to deal with these diverse behaviors simultaneously.

But what are the differences which characterize these two groups? Morse (1958) stated, "It is very difficult to separate children who feel guilt but who ward it off by saying that they do not care, from those who upon deep probing really do not care." (p. 576) This is one of the most commonly cited differentiations of these two populations. The chronically disruptive pupil typically has lower anxiety and does not seem concerned with what happens; particularly that which does not affect him or her directly. Conversely, the emotionally disabled youngster may experience a high anxiety level and does seem to be concerned with consequences. Telford and Sawrey (1967) point to a social learning differentiation of these two populations.

> The same overt behavior can stem from either emotional disturbance or social maladjustment. When the behavior pattern derives rather directly from the obvious social-learning situation and other aspects of personality malfunction are not present, it is generally called "social maladjustment." When the behavior of the individual is unlike that of his immediate peers and it is not apparent how the behavior was learned, it usually comes under the category of "emotionally disturbed." Many children who are delinquent are really victims of unfortunate social situations and have learned inappropriate behavior, but they are not emotionally disturbed. (p. 400)

Kirk (1972) concurs with this observation regarding the similarities of the surface overt behaviors of the chronically disruptive and emotionally disabled youngster. He goes on to say:

> It is the dynamics behind the behavior that is different. Children who are socially maladjusted display behavior which may be high valued within a small group (usually a small gang or peer group) but which is not within the range of culturally permissable either at home or in the school or in the community (Mackie, Kvaraceus and Williams, 1967). The socially maladjusted are able to adapt 'on the street' with responses approved by the peer group of which they are a part, (i.e. gang), but they come in conflict with parents, teachers, and others outside their immediate peer group. These children are usually unmanageable in the home, generate problems in the school, or are behind in educational achievement and are destructive, totally immature. They are generally characterized by lack of anxiety and they display anti-social behavior which interferes with the lives of others. (p. 319)

But what other characteristics differentiate the chronically disruptive from the emotionally disabled? Much of the following information is based on diagnostic opinions shared with me by Darrell Dierks and Jon Ford of Area Education Agency 7 in Cedar Falls, Iowa.

As mentioned earlier, a high anxiety level is often characteristic of those youngsters referred to as emotionally disabled. In contrast to this, the chronically disruptive youngster may often be characterized as possessing a low anxiety level. For most secondary youngsters, being sent to the principal's office may be considered an anxiety provoking situation. In contrast, chronically disruptive youngsters may appear quite calm under these circumstances and show little or no emotion when confronted with the facts of the pupil's alleged misbehavior in the school setting. Along with this characteristic, a tendency for the chronically disruptive youngster not to appear concerned about the negative consequences of his behavior is typical. In contrast, the emotionally disabled youngster might be quite concerned with what's going to happen. The chronically disruptive youngster may also only be

concerned with the consequences as they affect him/her directly. This is not the type of youngster who will be concerned with the consequences of his/her behavior as it affects the entire class. Such pleas as, "Your behavior is interfering with the learning of the entire class," will have little or no effect with these students.

The emotionally disabled youngster may be in a constant search to find ways of reducing his/her anxiety. In some cases this pupil may seek an inordinate amount of the teacher's time in trying to do so. In contrast, the chronically disruptive youngster would like nothing better than to be left alone. This student doesn't see where his/her behavior is unreasonable and has a hard time accepting all of the "unnecessary interference from those around him/her," especially authority figures such as teachers and principals. Along with this characteristic, the emotionally disabled youngster may be aware of the problems in school and actually want to change so as to lessen these uncomfortable situations. However, the chronically disruptive youngster has a tendency to perceive the locus of the problems as possessed by others and sees the necessary changes taking place there rather than within himself or herself. When asked what the problems are, the chronically disruptive youngster has a tendency to describe the problem as being the property of others rather than of himself.

In the classroom, the emotionally disabled youngster may have many problems "reading" the environment. Perceptually, this pupil may misinterpret the environment, including the relationship of personal behavior to the total classroom operation. Contrary to this, the chronically disruptive youngster may be quite proficient at reading the environment; including an eagerness to point out inconsistencies in the teacher's management interventions. The chronically disruptive youngster may work hard to "control" the classroom environment, including both peers and teachers. He or she may be quite

successful in facilitating the process by which peers share in the "problems" of getting along in the traditional classroom.

In summary, we see that many of the behaviors we observe in identifying a pupil as chronically disruptive are similar to those behaviors manifested by pupils with emotional disabilities. In order to differentiate these two populations, we must examine the qualitative components of such a youngster's behavior pattern. This is a task we must accomplish to appropriately program for this population of handicapped pupils.

We must, at the same time, realize that we are dealing with an area in which questions are plentiful and answers are rare. Park (1976) articulates many of these questions as they are being related to the treatment of adult character disorders; the extreme manifestation of many of those behaviors we may observe in the chronically disruptive pupil.

> Are such people mentally or emotionally disordered? Should they be given a psychiatric label? Should they be treated for the problems in living, rather than being punished, or imprisoned, or avoided? Suppose they don't want treatment? ...How socially deviant does a person have to be, how unreliable, how dangerous, how much scourge to his children and a grief to his parents before it makes sense to label him "character disordered?" Have we the right to judge him by society's norms and suggest that his failure to measure up is a sign of illness? Is his misconduct really beyond his control? Between calling him a bad man and calling him a sick man — which is preferable? For him? For society? Which is more accurate? (p. 40)

Definition and Identification Procedure

Our Iowa definition of chronically disruptive states:

> "Chronically disruptive" is the inclusive term describing those pupils who repeatedly exhibit markedly unacceptable behavior preventing a satisfactory adjustment to the regular school program and significantly interfering with the pupil's learning process and interpersonal relationships. This behavior occurs to such a degree that the administration or local school district board has excluded the pupil from the regular instructional program. The school shall document prior attempts to modify the regular education program in

> such a way as to meet the educational needs of the pupil. A director of special education shall consult with representatives of appropriate juvenile agencies as a part of the diagnostic-educational staffing. (Rules of Special Education, 1977)

With a new definition in any area, there is quite often much confusion centered around the interpretation of such a definition. I will now try to analyze our definition and provide some direction as to the implementation of this definition. This is not meant to be the definitive statement on this definition, but rather the beginning of the process of clarifying this area.

The first sentence of this definition uses such terms as "repeatedly," "markedly unacceptable," and "significantly." Such variables as these must be shown through the use of objective data. This objective data should minimally include: a) objective observational data; b) checklist data; and c) anecdotal school records.

Objective observational data is compiled by an objective person (consultant, psychologist, etc.) observing in the school setting and formally gathering observational data related to a particular youngster and his/her classroom interaction. Observational systems include the components of specific behaviors observed, specific recordings, and the specific time frame in which such behaviors are observed. One of the obvious problems in gathering this data with chronically disruptive youngsters is that many of these youngsters might not be in the school for observation. But in most cases, there should be the availability of some time to implement the observational process with these youngsters.

The second type of behavioral data is behavioral checklist data. These checklists may be obtained commercially or modified to meet more specific local needs. Though formats may differ, these checklists generally have significant others who are in contact with the youngster -- teacher, counselors,

administrators -- respond to various behavioral descriptors and note whether such behaviors are a problem with the particular youngster in question and, if so, to what degree they are a problem.

The third way we document such terms as "repeatedly," "markedly unacceptable," or "significantly" is through school records. Records may include administrative records of disciplinary actions as well as teacher anecdotal records.

By combining information gathered from behavioral observation techniques, behavioral checklist data, and school records we will be in a much better position to describe those behaviors which have reached such an unacceptable level in the school setting that they necessitate a self-contained program serving chronically disruptive youngsters.

Another component of our definition states that pupil behavior has reached such an unacceptable level that "...the administration or local school district board has excluded the pupil from the regular instructional program." This includes a) in-school suspension from the regular school program, b) short-term suspension (up to three days), c) administrative suspension from school for an indefinite period of time (not to exceed ten days), and d) board action suspension. When identifying youngsters chronically disruptive, there must be a record of one or more of these actions being taken during the previous year. Documentation verifying this should be provided to the staffing team. Specific information related to the circumstance which led to such an exclusion is also important to consider.

It is important to stress the historical nature of this exclusion. This suspension should have occurred prior to the youngster being considered for a chronically disruptive program. We are not advocating that youngsters be excluded from regular instruction merely to qualify for programs serving

the chronically disruptive. Rather, we are looking on this exclusion as further evidence that a pupil's behavior has reached such a level as to be intolerable in the school setting.

It is also important to differentiate "exclusion" from "separation." Exclusion implies that the school has taken necessary action to exclude a youngster from the regular instructional program. Separation includes those situations in which a youngster is removed from a school setting (for example, the youngster is removed by the court and placed in a facility outside a school district, thus cannot continue his/her education in the home school district). In the identification of youngsters as chronically disruptive we are speaking of "exclusion" rather than "separation." A pupil placed outside of his home school district in a residential program may qualify as chronically disruptive but does not automatically qualify by virtue of such a placement.

Our definition of chronically disruptive also includes the phrase "...documentation of prior attempts to modify the regular education program in such a way as to meet the educational needs of the pupil." What are examples of such "prior attempts?" Prior attempts include such actions as: 1) the full range of standard or usual disciplinary actions normally used in the school setting, 2) a documentation of academic modifications attempted in those cases in which the youngster is academically behind in his school work, 3) a change of teachers in those cases where there may have been a particular "personality clash" between the teacher and pupil, 4) a documentation of a number of parent conferences held in efforts to enlist the parents' involvement in improving the younster's school behavior, 5) involvement of the school guidance counselor in attempting to effectively deal with the disruptive behavior and 6) the enlistment of AEA support personnel such as school psychologists and school social workers in an attempt to improve the behavior of the younster in

question, and so forth. This is not meant to be an all inclusive listing of "prior attempts," but rather some examples of the documentation that should be available at the time of staffing.

The final portion of this definition states that, "the director of special education shall consult with representatives of appropriate juvenile agencies as part of the diagnostic-educational staffing process." The youngsters we identify as chronically disruptive may also be involved with community agencies other than the school. If the pupil is so involved, it is important to have such agencies participate in our staffing process. Such agencies may include representatives of the juvenile court system, the Department of Social Services and other community agencies involved with serving children and/or adolescents.

Need for Programs: Educational Concerns

Hirshoren, Schultz, Manten and Henderson (1970) surveyed the nation regarding public school programming for behaviorally disordered youngsters. As part of this survey, these authors addressed the question of exclusion from school. The two most common answers given to the questions of why a youngster would be excluded from school were: 1) the pupil cannot profit from the educational services provided, and 2) the pupil's behavior is too disruptive and thus interferes with the educational programming of other children. In Iowa, one of our primary goals in providing programs for the chronically disruptive is to provide an option to the exclusion of such youngsters from obtaining educational programs; a program we feel is vital in assuring that such an individual can be successful in our society as an adult. Yet we must provide alternatives to exclusion which meets the needs of these youngsters receiving such an option. They must have access to an "appropriate" educational program. As stated in a 1974 report by the Children's Defense Fund:

> We would like to see many more alternatives that are real alternatives, that are academically strong, and that are provided within regular schools to reduce segregation and isolation that many such programs now suffer. It is important not only to encourage continuing interaction between children needing these programs and other children, but also to legitimatize these programs as regular and equal academic options. (p. 147)

Some critics of the development of programs for the chronically disruptive state that we already have a means of dealing with such youngsters. Unfortunately, this strategy often includes the exclusion of such pupils from our public schools. Both Federal and State statutes have limited the use of such procedures with handicapped pupils. The Children's Defense Fund has addressed this issue in their publication, Children Out of School in America (1974). I am going to borrow and expand on these ideas.

First, as we have addressed earlier, chronically disruptive youngsters are commonly deficient in their academic abilities. This is manifested in both skills commonly taught in school academic areas as well as those skills we find as prerequisites to employment in our society. How can we expect to deal with these deficits if we exclude such youngsters from school? "If children with discipline problems also are weak in their studies, their missed classes, and exams may doom them to fail completely." (Children's Defense Fund, 1974)

Removal of youngsters from our educational system merely does just that. We may be excluding youngsters from the major system that can most easily and readily provide them with the services they need. Such services as educational diagnosis, support services, unique special educational services, can only be delivered if the youngster is attending school. As Morse (1974) stated, "Schools have group life, a vast range of possible activities, many caring adults and a mandate to use these resources for the welfare of all children, even the deviant child." (p. 165)

Another adverse effect in using suspension as a means by which to deal with these children is that it in effect establishes a "mind set" that the only way to deal with this youngster is to get him out of school. Teachers may acquire the prejudice that nothing can be done to modify the educational environment to handle these youngsters; "after all we saw in the past that the only thing that worked was to kick 'em out." This would appear to establish a very small educational repertoire of methods of dealing with such youngsters.

A final potential effect of dealing with these youngsters via suspension is that we may in fact be planting the seed and setting the scene for delinquency. "Putting children out of school, leaving them idle with no supervision, especially when they are demonstrating that they have problems, leaves children alone to cope with their future." (Children's Defense Fund, 1974)

Summary

In this paper I have dealt with the areas of the characteristics of those pupils we refer to as chronically disruptive, the differentiation of this handicapped population from emotionally disabled pupils, the procedures by which we identify such pupils in Iowa and the professional rationale for providing such programs. Such programs offer an alternative to historical exclusionary practices. By developing these programs we are creating an appropriate educational option and a more professionally defensible posture in dealing with many youngsters whom we might have considered "hopeless" in the past. As stated in a special report prepared for Congress by the Departments of Justice and Health, Education, and Welfare (1977):

> Many factors, including social, cultural, and familial, contribute to a child's delinquency. It is rarely possible to pinpoint one factor alone as being the primary cause. Many theories have been developed on the causes of juvenile delinquency, but no easy cure-all will be found to eliminate it. However, one area which may have potential for affecting delinquent behavior is the nation's public school systems. (p. 2)

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